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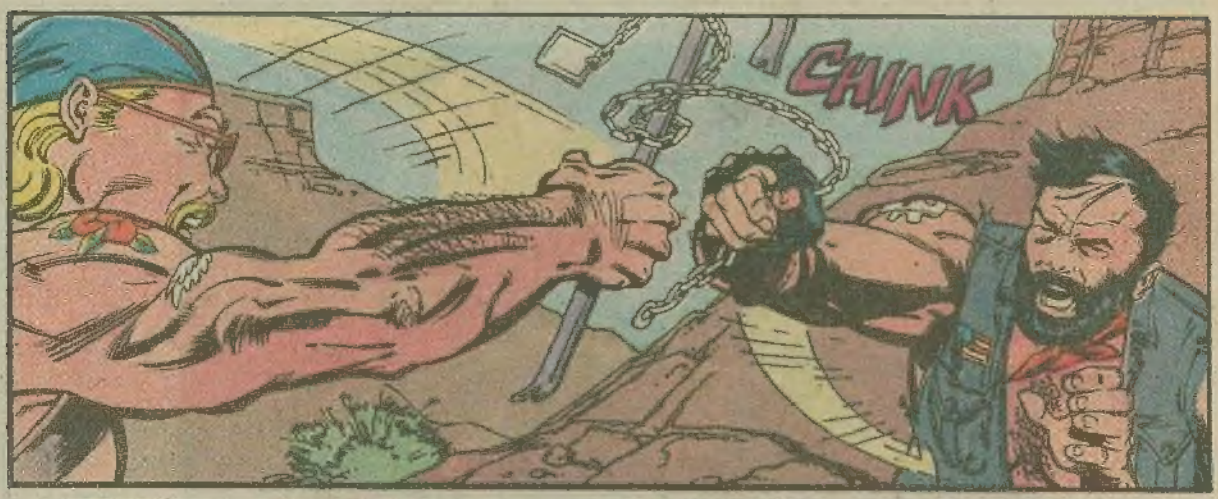
IN MY SADDLEBAGS I'VE GOT TEN POUNDS OF CRYSTAL METH THAT I COOKED IN PHOENIX. THE GANGS ARE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR CHEMISTS.
SODA SPR
5 MILES
THE TOURISTS DON'T GO TO SODA SPRINGS SINCE SATAN'S LORDS TOOK OVER. THE LORDS ARE THE BIGGEST AND NASTIEST OF THE ARIZONA GANGS.
THEIR LEADER, HEC BIRCH, FANCIES HIMSELF A POET AND SOME KIND OF RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALIST, BUT HE'S JUST A THUG. THE LORDS ARE OPPOSED BY THE NOUVEAU GROTESQUE GALLOPING GEESE. I HOPE TO SET THE TWO GANGS AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS.
LUCKY FOR ME THESE BIKER GANGS OPERATE AS PRIMITIVE TRIBAL CULTURES -- IT MEANS IF YOU'VE GOT GUTS, LUCK, AND SOME BARBECUE SAUCE, YOU CAN BUST RIGHT IN.

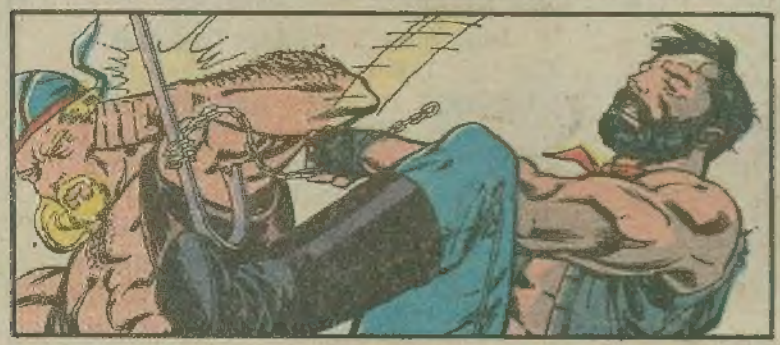
OR YOU CAN GET KILLED TRYING.
WATCHOO DOIN' HERE, PILGRIM?
YOU WEARIN' COLORS IN A LORD'S CAMP?
I'M NOT WEARING COLORS.

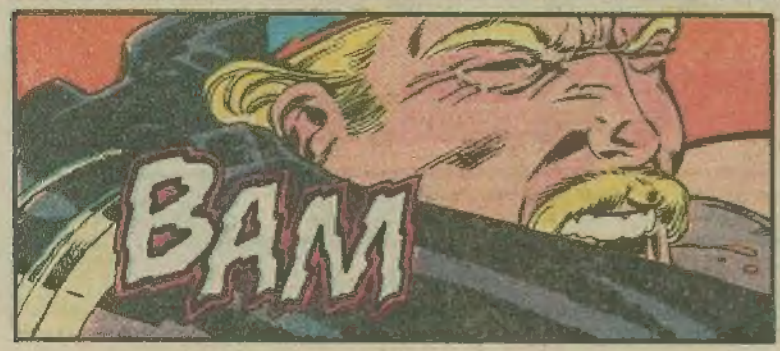
YEAH, BUT WE DON'T KNOW YOU. THIS IS OUR HOME, SEE, AN' YOU COME BARGIN' IN HERE...
YOU DON'T EVEN WALK YOUR HOG, MAN. YOU RIDE RIGHT INTO OUR LIVING ROOM!
I GOT BUSINESS WITH HEC. YOU BOYS WANT TO SHOW ME TO HIM OR RUN YOUR SMOTHERS BROTHERS ROUTINE?
IN THE WORDS OF OUR 40TH PRESIDENT, "WE MIGHT AS WELL HAVE THE BLOOD BATH NOW AND GET IT OVER WITH."
BAP
WHUMP


CHINK

WHAP

BAP




BAM

OKAY, TOUGH GUY. YOU WANTED TO SEE HEC, HERE I AM.

I HEARD YOU WERE LOOKING FOR COOKS...

ALREADY GOT A COOK.

NOT LIKE ME. LET ME SHOW YOU MY STUFF.

WHERE IS IT?

SADDLEBAG. BETTER LET ME DO IT-- IT'S RIGGED.

COME INTO MY OFFICE. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
CALL ME FREEWHEELIN' FRANK.
ARE YOU A FURRY FREAK BROTHER?

NO. AS A MATTER OF FACT, I'D RATHER HAVE MONEY THAN DOPE. THAT'S WHY I'M HERE.
WE ALREADY GOT COOKS.
THEY CAN'T GIVE YOU THE GRADE I CAN DELIVER.

FRANK, I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE A FED OR JUST PLAIN CRAZY. YOU DON'T LOOK WHACKED OUT, BUT IF YOU'REA COOK, YOU CAN'T AVOID IT. IT GETS IN YOUR SKIN. I CAN'T USE WHACK-OUTS EITHER.

I'M NOT WHACKED AND I AIN'T NO FED. LOOK AT THAT HAND-- STEADY AS A BELT-DRIVE-HARLEY.
I GOT A SKILL-- I WANT TO MAKE MONEY, AND I'VE BEEN A BIKER ALL MY LIFE. IT'S EITHER YOU OR THE GEESE.

RAPE AND PILLAGE-- THAT'S WHAT BEIN' IN THE LORDS IS. IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT TO DO, FRANK?
AW, HECK, HEC, THIS IS JUST A PHASE I'M PASSING THROUGH ON MY WAY TO BECOMING A RICH REPUBLICAN.

GIMME FIVE. I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU A TRYOUT.

THERE'S OUR LAB-- IN THAT SEMI. WE USE THE ENGINE FOR AIR-CONDITIONING-- STOLE THE TRUCK IN OREGON.
LET'S TAKE A LOOK.

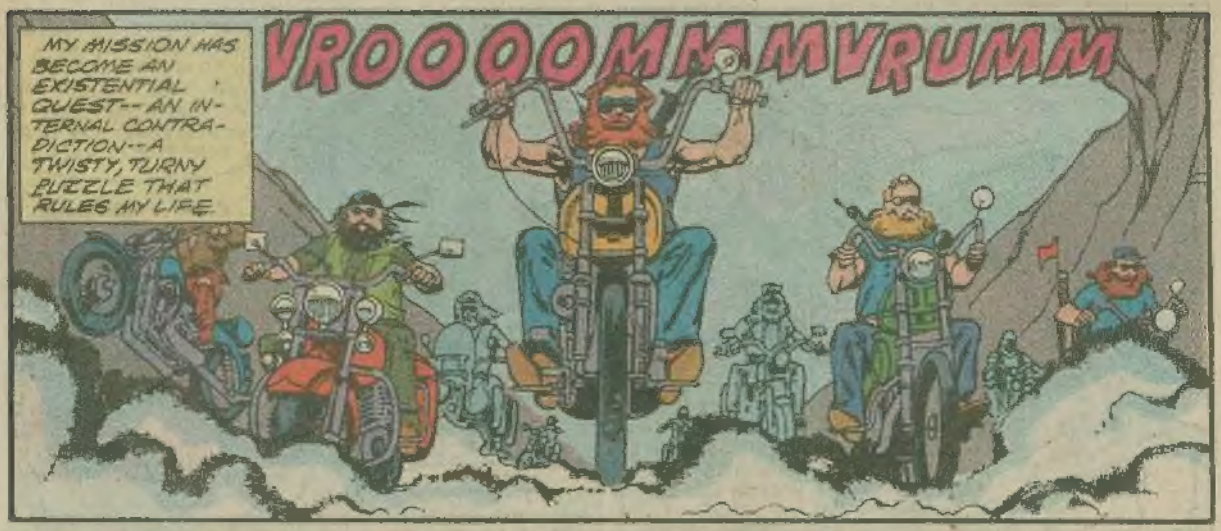
HOW'S IT GOIN', GASHOG?
HOLY SMOKE!

KRAK!
THUNK

C'MON! IT'S THE GEESE!

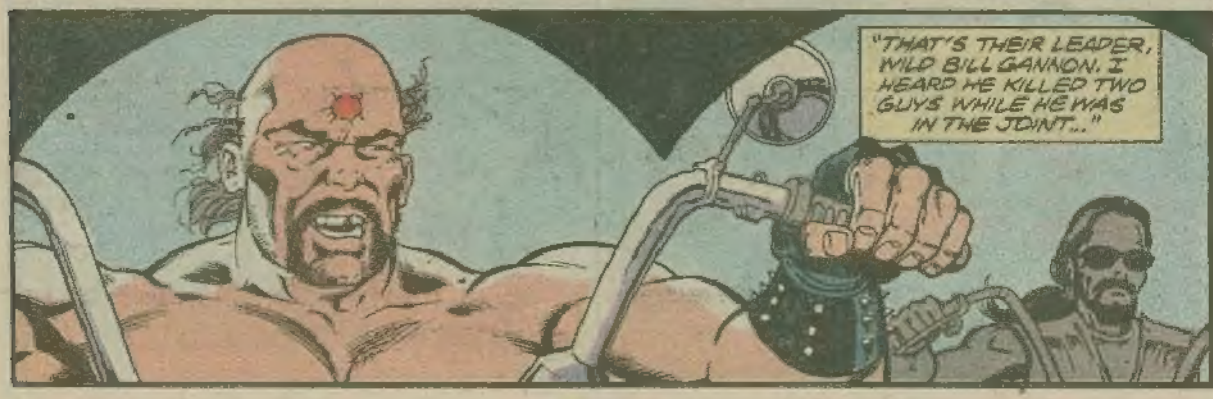
FOOM

WHUMP

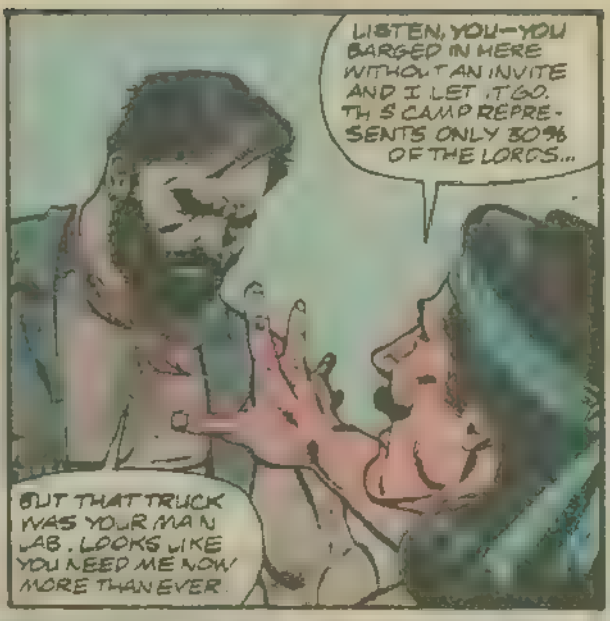

MY MISSION HAS BECOME AN EXISTENTIAL QUEST--AN INTERNAL CONTRADICTION--A TWISTY, TURNY PUZZLE THAT RULES MY LIFE.
VROOOOMMMMVRUMM

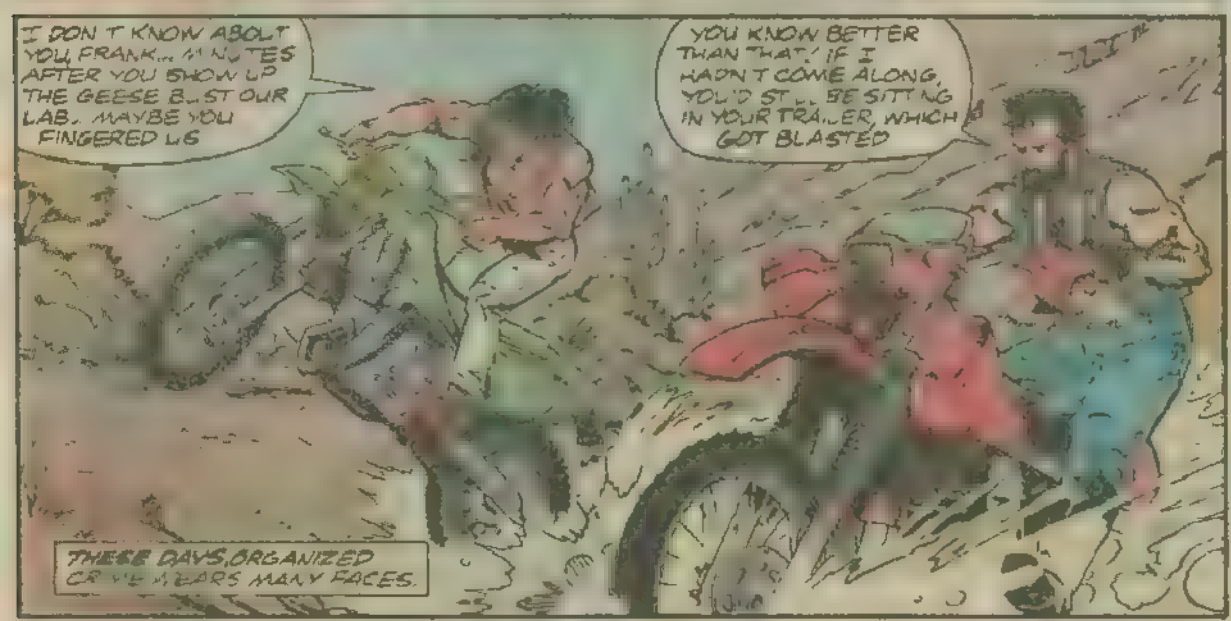
PUNISH THE MOBSTERS--BRING THEM DOWN, WRECK THEIR PLANS, SMASH THEIR FACES.
BRAPP
BLAM

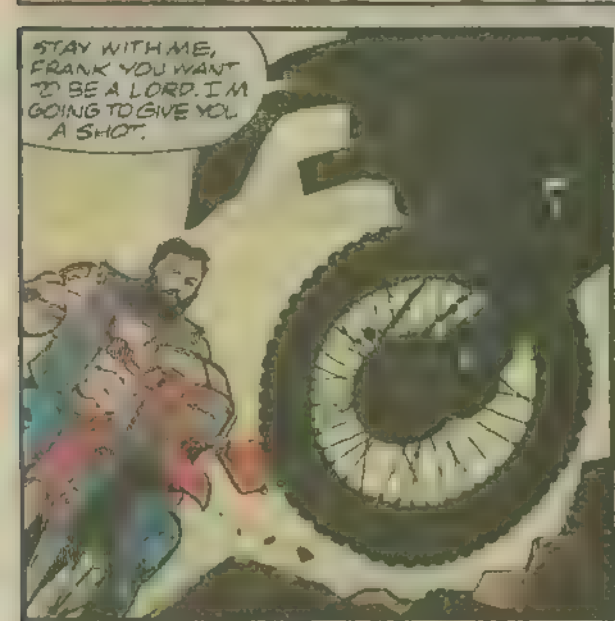
IT'S THE GEESE--THEY MUST HAVE MOST OF THEIR WEST COAST CLUBS IN ON THIS. GOTTA BE A HUNDRED SOLDIERS DOWN THERE...
LET ME SEE...


"THAT'S THEIR LEADER, WILD BILL GANNON. I HEARD HE KILLED TWO GUYS WHILE HE WAS IN THE JOINT..."

COME ON! I'VE GOT SOME TRAIL BIKES STASHED IN THE ARROYO!
I DON'T KNOW, MEC-- THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE MUCH LEFT OF YOUR ORGANIZATION

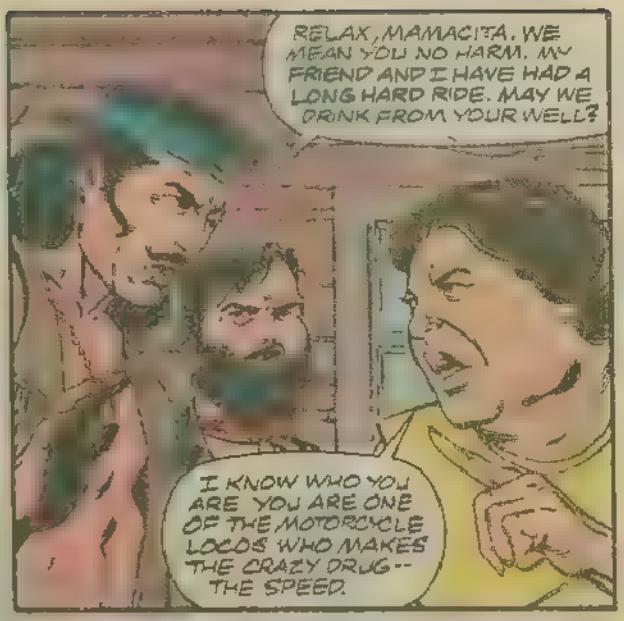

LISTEN, YOU—YOU BARGED IN HERE WITHOUT AN INVITE AND I LET IT GO. THIS CAMP REPRESENTS ONLY 30% OF THE LORDS...
BUT THAT TRUCK WAS YOUR MAIN LAB. LOOKS LIKE YOU NEED ME NOW MORE THAN EVER.


I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, FRANK... MINUTES AFTER YOU SHOW UP THE GEESE BUST OUR LAB. MAYBE YOU FINGERED US
YOU KNOW BETTER THAN THAT! IF I HADN'T COME ALONG, YOU'D STILL BE SITTING IN YOUR TRAILER, WHICH GOT BLASTED
THESE DAYS, ORGANIZED CRIME WEARS MANY FACES.


STAY WITH ME, FRANK. YOU WANT TO BE A LORD. I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU A SHOT.

SEVERAL HOURS LATER...

HOLA, MAMACITA-- S YOUR HUSBAND AROUND?
MY HUSBAND N LL BE BACK ANY MINUTE N TH MY SONS. THEY ARE BIG MEN AND THEY ARE ARMED

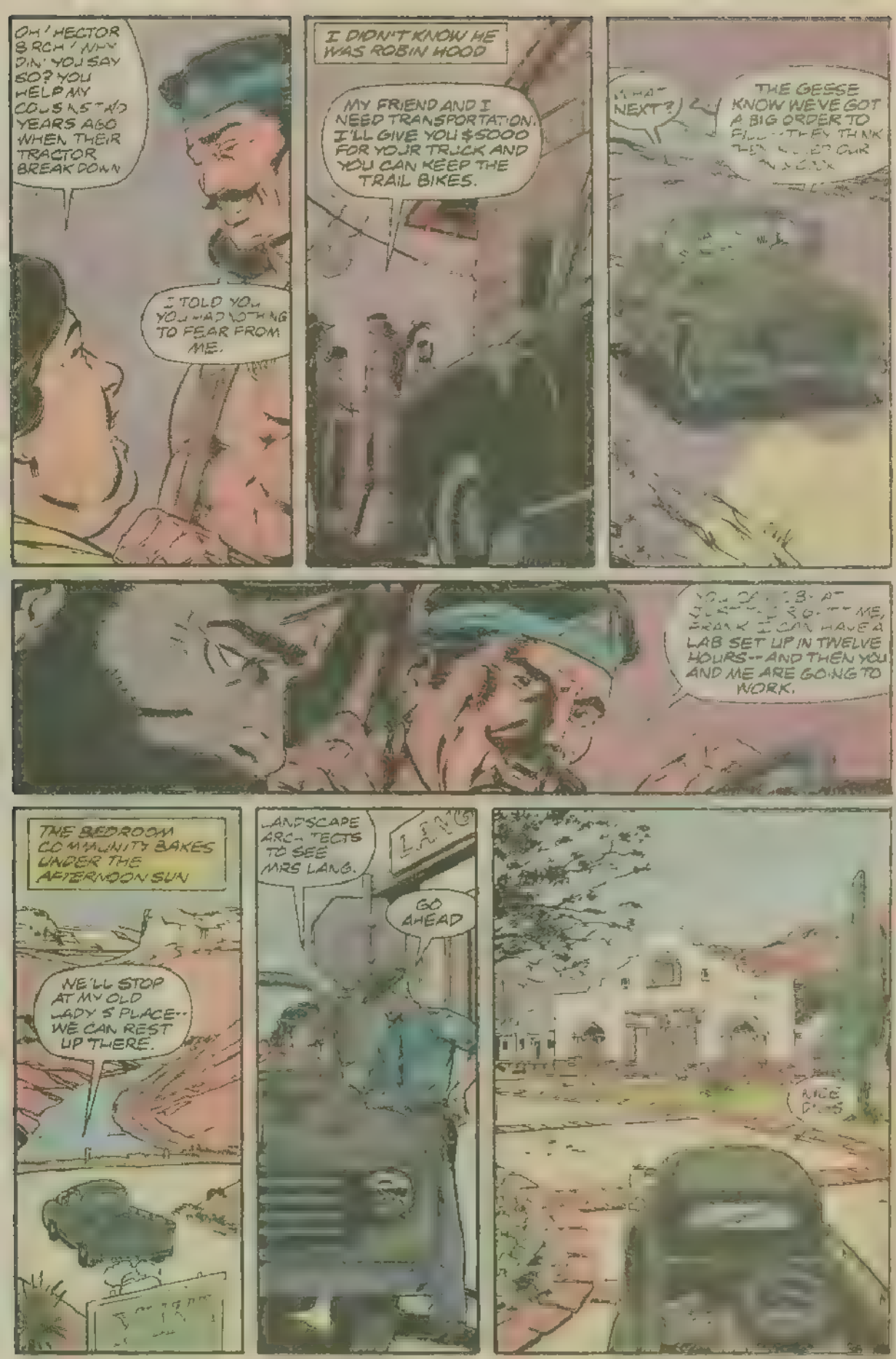

RELAX, MAMACITA. WE MEAN YOU NO HARM. MY FRIEND AND I HAVE HAD A LONG HARD RIDE. MAY WE DRINK FROM YOUR WELL?
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE YOU ARE ONE OF THE MOTORCYCLE LOCOS WHO MAKES THE CRAZY DRUG-- THE SPEED.

WE KEEP OUR BUSINESS AWAY FROM HONEST FOLK LIKE YOU.
WE MOVED OUT HERE TO GET AWAY FROM DRUGS.

ESMERELDA, GET AWAY FROM THOSE MEN.

MAKE NO SUDDEN MOVES, MY SONS HAVE YOU COVERED

MISTER, WE COME IN PEACE. MY NAME S HEC BIRCH-- MAYBE YOU'VE HEARD OF ME...


OH! HECTOR SRCH! WHY DIN' YOU SAY SO? YOU HELP MY COUSINS TWO YEARS AGO WHEN THEIR TRACTOR BREAK DOWN
I TOLD YOU YOU HAD NOTHING TO FEAR FROM ME.
I DIDN'T KNOW HE WAS ROBIN HOOD
MY FRIEND AND I NEED TRANSPORTATION. I'LL GIVE YOU $5000 FOR YOUR TRUCK AND YOU CAN KEEP THE TRAIL BIKES.
WHAT NEXT?
THE GESSE KNOW WE'VE GOT A BIG ORDER TO
LAB SET UP IN TWELVE HOURS--AND THEN YOU AND ME ARE GOING TO WORK.
THE BEDROOM COMMUNITY BAKES UNDER THE AFTERNOON SUN
WE'LL STOP AT MY OLD LADY'S PLACE-- WE CAN REST UP THERE.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS TO SEE MRS LANG.
LANG
GO AHEAD

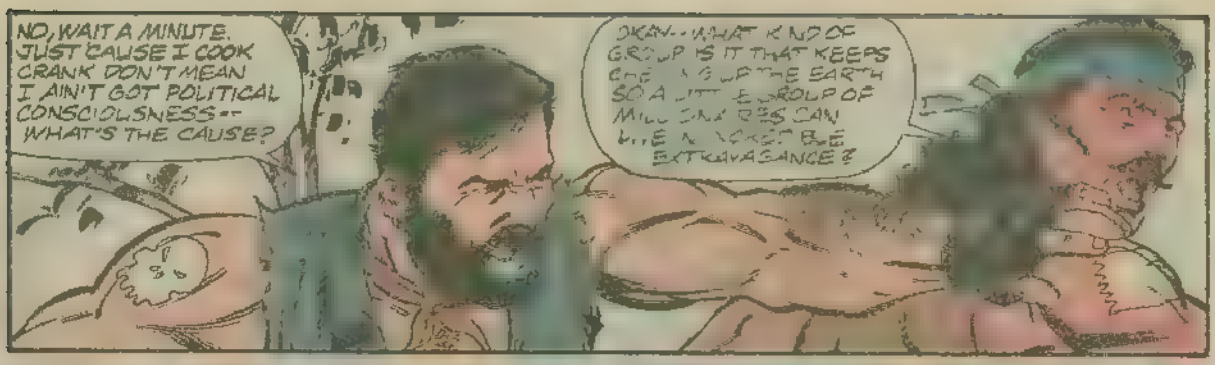
DON'T EMBARRASS ME

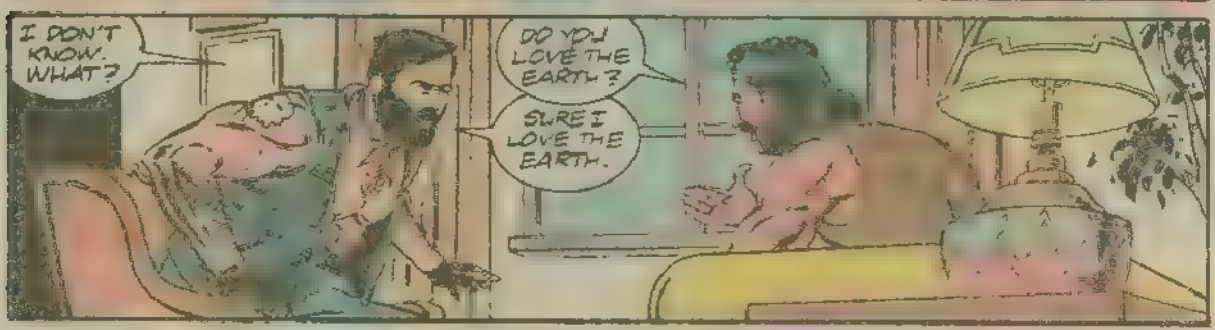
HEC! WHERE'D YOU GET THAT TRUCK? I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY LET YOU IN!
YEAH. WE HAD A BIT OF LUCK..

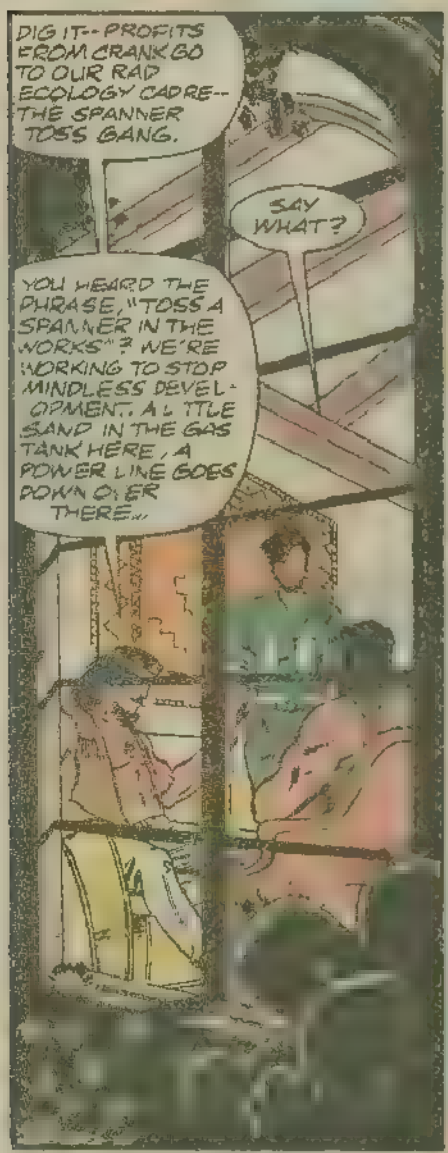
HOLLY, THIS IS FRANK-- HE'S MY NEW COOK. WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME-- THE GEESE HIT OUR LAB TODAY AND I'VE ONLY GOT 48 HOURS TO DELIVER 200 KEYS OF CRANK.
HOWDY
THE GEESE ATTACKED YOUR LAB?

ARE YOU PLANNING TO USE THE HACIENDA?

EXCUSE ME-- WHAT CAUSE?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, FRANK. IT WON'T INTERFERE WITH BUSINESS AS USUAL..

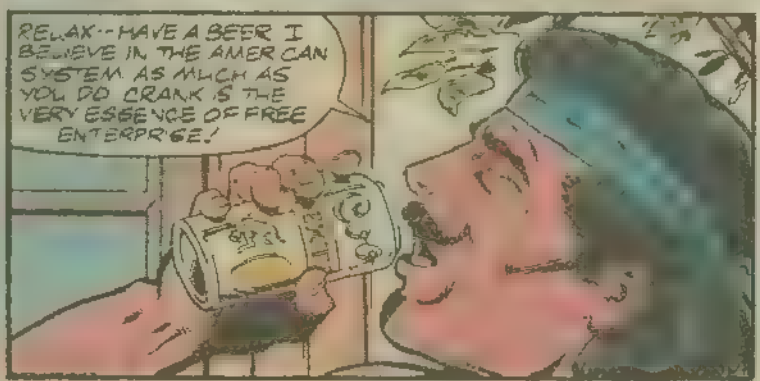

NO, WAIT A MINUTE. JUST CAUSE I COOK CRANK DON'T MEAN I AIN'T GOT POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS-- WHAT'S THE CAUSE?
OKAY--WHAT KIND OF GROUP IS IT THAT KEEPS ONE UP THE EARTH SO A LITTLE GROUP OF MILLIONAIRES CAN LIVE IN LUXURY AND EXTRAVAGANCE?

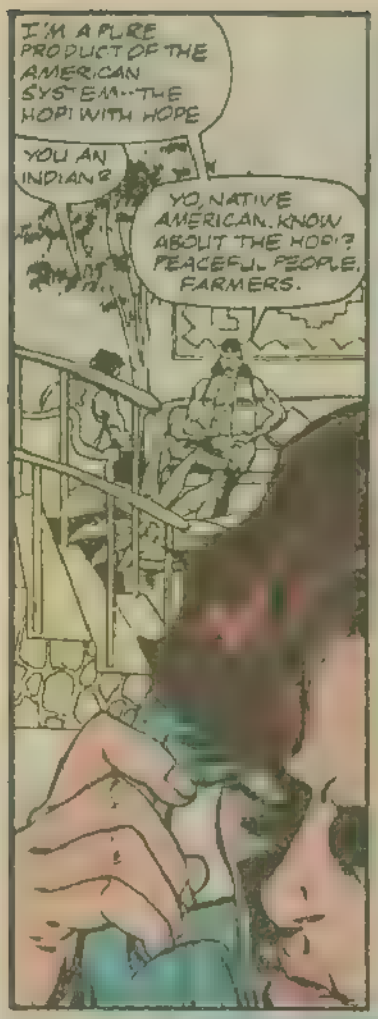

I DON'T KNOW. WHAT?
DO YOU LOVE THE EARTH?
SURE I LOVE THE EARTH.


DIG IT--PROFITS FROM CRANK GO TO OUR RAD ECOLOGY CADRE-- THE SPANNER TOSS GANG.
SAY WHAT?
YOU HEARD THE PHRASE, "TOSS A SPANNER IN THE WORKS"? WE'RE WORKING TO STOP MINDLESS DEVELOPMENT. A LITTLE SAND IN THE GAS TANK HERE, A POWER LINE GOES DOWN OVER THERE...

YOU KNOW THAT BRIDGE THAT COLLAPSED IN SOUTH COLORADO LAST YEAR? THE SPANNER TOSS GANG BLEW IT UP SO THEY WOULDN'T BUILD CONDOS IN MESA VERDE
WAIT A MINUTE.

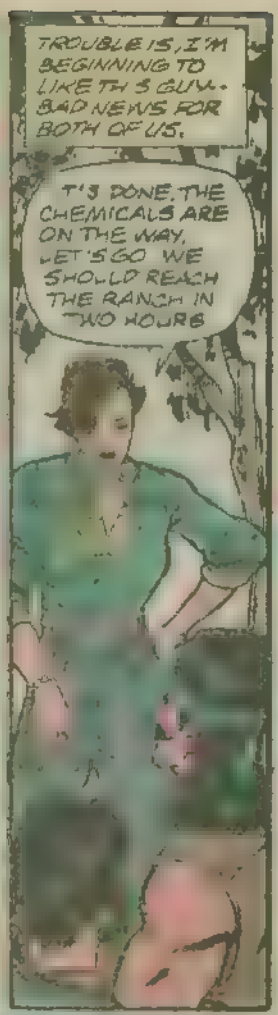
I'M A LOYAL AMERICAN. I SERVED IN 'NAM. I DON'T WANT ANY PART OF AN ORGANIZATION THAT ESPOUSES VIOLENT OVERTHROW OF THE GOVERNMENT


RELAX--HAVE A BEER. I BELIEVE IN THE AMERICAN SYSTEM AS MUCH AS YOU DO. CRANK IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF FREE ENTERPRISE!

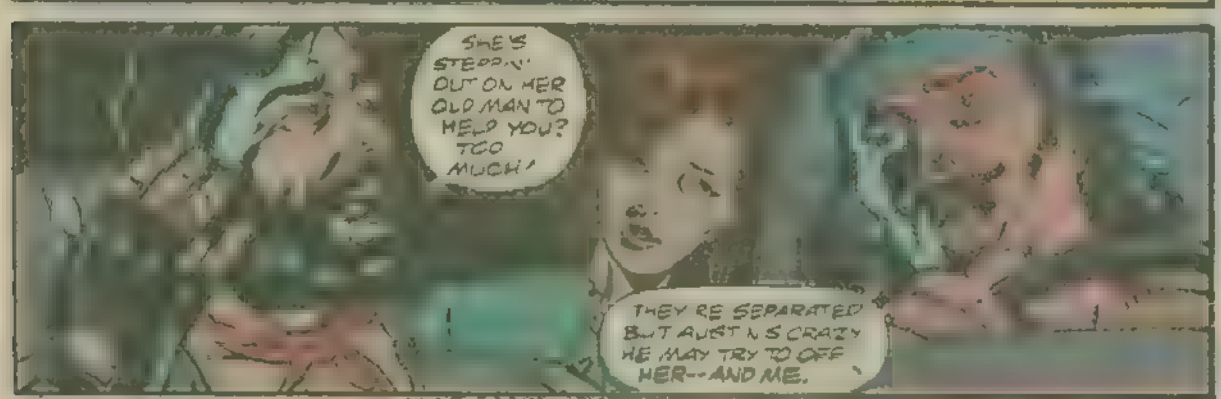

I'M A PURE PRODUCT OF THE AMERICAN SYSTEM--THE HOPI WITH HOPE
YOU AN INDIAN?
YO, NATIVE AMERICAN. KNOW ABOUT THE HOPI? PEACEFUL PEOPLE. FARMERS.

THIS USED TO BE A GREAT COUNTRY BEFORE THE REAL ESTATE DEVELOPERS TOOK OVER

IT WILL BE GREAT AGAIN, ONCE WE RECLAIM THE WEST FOR THE EARTH...
REVOLUTIONARY CHIC--THAT I HATE IT. THE REAL ATTACKS ARE WORSE THAN CAREER CRIMINALS BECAUSE THEIR CAUSE TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER EVERYTHING.


TROUBLE IS, I'M BEGINNING TO LIKE THIS GUY. BAD NEWS FOR BOTH OF US.
IT'S DONE. THE CHEMICALS ARE ON THE WAY. LET'S GO. WE SHOULD REACH THE RANCH IN TWO HOURS

WHAT'S YOUR ANGLE, HOLLY? YOU AN INDIAN, TOO?
I BELIEVE IN THE CAUSE.
HOLLY'S OLD MAN IS AUSTIN LANG--HE'S THE [illegible] INVESTOR BEHIND THE MOVE TO DEVELOP SOUTHWEST ARIZONA.


SHE'S STEPPIN' OUT ON HER OLD MAN TO HELP YOU? TOO MUCH!
THEY'RE SEPARATED BUT AUSTIN'S CRAZY. HE MAY TRY TO OFF HER--AND ME.

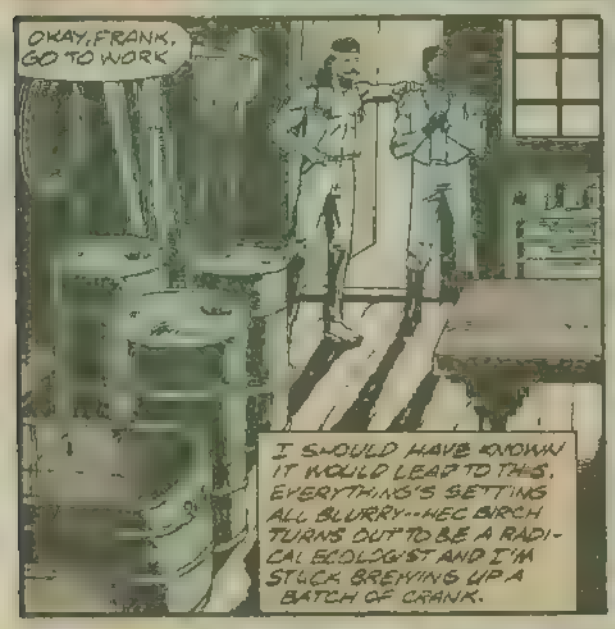
BRRR--I HATE THIS ROOM

WHY DON'T YOU GET RID OF IT?

IT'S A MONUMENT TO AUSTIN'S MEGALOMANIA. I WANT PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THE TYPE OF MAN WE'RE UP AGAINST..

THE CHEMICALS ARE HERE

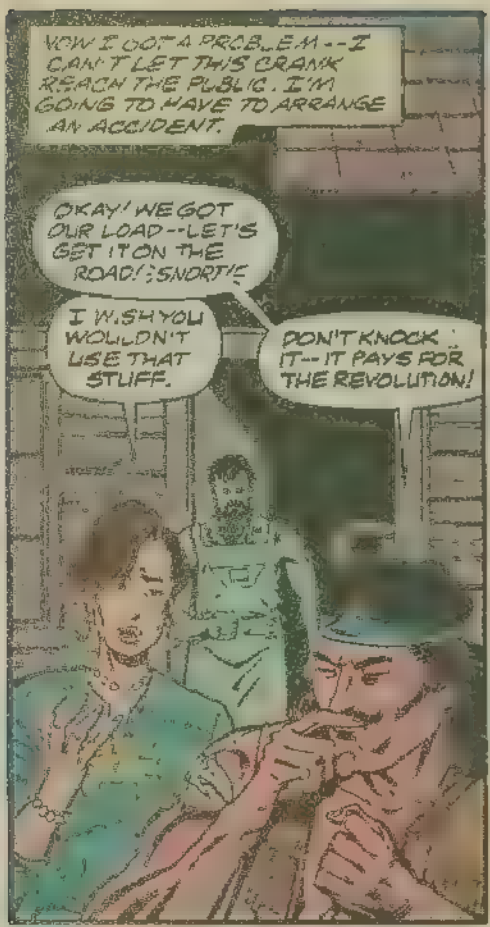
YO BAXTER! TAKE THE STUFF TO THAT SHED OUT BACK
YO - HEC THOUGHT THE GEESE GOT YOU. WE MUST BE BACK IN BUSINESS


OKAY, FRANK, GO TO WORK
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN IT WOULD LEAD TO THIS. EVERYTHING'S SETTING ALL BLURRY--HEC BIRCH TURNS OUT TO BE A RADICAL ECOLOGIST AND I'M STUCK BREWING UP A BATCH OF CRANK.

HOURS LATER
GO AHEAD-- TRY IT.
WHY NOT? WHO NEEDS TO SLEEP?

SNORT

WHOO-EEE! WE ARE CRANKIN' NOW!

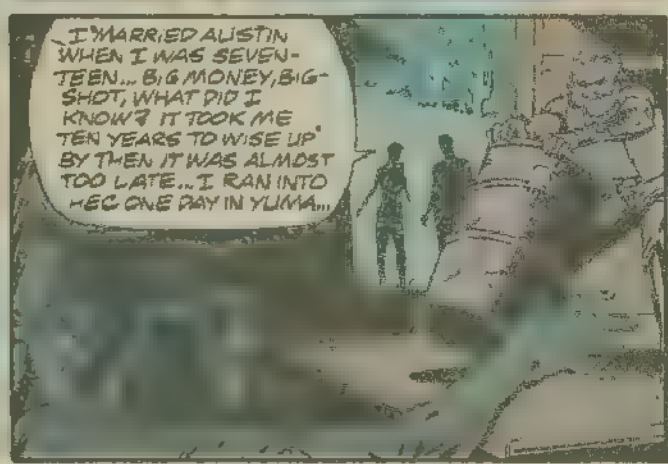

NOW I GOT A PROBLEM--I CAN'T LET THIS CRANK REACH THE PUBLIC. I'M GOING TO HAVE TO ARRANGE AN ACCIDENT.
OKAY! WE GOT OUR LOAD--LET'S GET IT ON THE ROAD! SNORTIE
I WISH YOU WOULDN'T USE THAT STUFF.
DON'T KNOCK IT--IT PAYS FOR THE REVOLUTION!

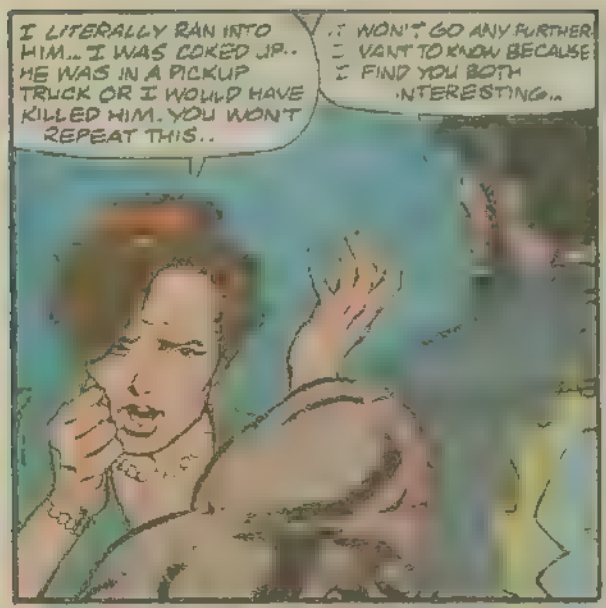
I GOT ANOTHER PROBLEM--HE'S A DIFFERENT CAT CRANKED--HE'S AN ACCIDENT LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO HAPPEN
THOSE FAT CAT DEVELOPERS! RIPPING OFF THE EARTH FOR A FEW LOUSY BUCKS...

SHOVE THIS PUSSYFOOTIN' AROUND! I'D LIKE TO SHOVE THIS HEK UP AUSTIN'S BUTT, AND BLOW HIM UP LIKE A BIG BALLOON!
BE COOL, MAN. WE GOT CRANK TO DELIVER YOU WANNA HELP LOAD THE TRUCK OR WHAT?

RIGHT! RIGHT! LET'S GET IT LOADED! LEAD ME TO IT!
HE OKAY?
I DON'T LIKE IT. THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO ABOUT IT.

YOU AND HIM, I DON'T GET IT.
HE'S A BEAUTIFUL MAN WHEN HE'S NOT... HE SAVED ME FROM A VERY UNHAPPY SITUATION...


I MARRIED AUSTIN WHEN I WAS SEVENTEEN... BIG MONEY, BIG-SHOT, WHAT DID I KNOW? IT TOOK ME TEN YEARS TO WISE UP. BY THEN IT WAS ALMOST TOO LATE... I RAN INTO HEC ONE DAY IN YUMA...


I LITERALLY RAN INTO HIM... I WAS COKED UP.. HE WAS IN A PICKUP TRUCK OR I WOULD HAVE KILLED HIM. YOU WON'T REPEAT THIS..
IT WON'T GO ANY FURTHER. I WANT TO KNOW BECAUSE I FIND YOU BOTH INTERESTING..

IF I'D STAYED WITH AUSTIN, I'D EITHER BE DEAD OR A HOPELESS HOPHEAD HE GOT ME OFF COKE IF YOU CAN BELIEVE THAT
HEY-- I GOT NO PROBLEM WITH THE GUY... WHEN HE'S STRAIGHT WE'D BETTER CHECK ON THAT LOAD

YOU GUYS NEED A HAND?
WHADDAYOU THINK? HOIST THAT BOX UP HERE.

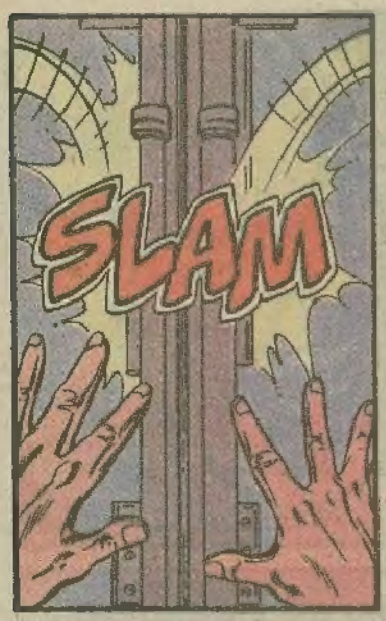
HEY, MAN... HERE COMES SNAGGLETOOTH. WHY DON'TCHA GET UP HERE AND HELP STACK? I'LL GO BACK TO THE LAB AND GET THE DOLLY

OKAY, HAND ME A BOX.
COME OVER HERE AND SIT ON THE FLOOR..

DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPID OR I'LL BLOW YOUR HEAD OFF.

THIS ITHACA 37 WILL CUT YOU IN HALF AT THIS RANGE.
YOU MUST BE AUSTIN LANG.
SMART DIRTBAG. HOLLY AND THE WETBACK--WHERE ARE THEY?
THE ART OF MIS-DIRECTION-- HATSU YAKAMOTO TAUGHT ME. IT'S IN THE RHYTHM OF THE GLANCE.
THEY'RE RIGHT THERE.
BOOM
THAT'S ONE FREE SHOT. IF HE STRIKES ONE OF THOSE 50 GALLON DRUMS, WE'RE ALL COOKED MEAT. CRANK'S TOUCHY STUFF.

KRAK
WHUMP
BANG
BANG
CREEEEK


SLAM

SWAK
CHIK

I KNEW IT! THAT LYIN' FRANK WAS IN CAHOOTS WITH AUSTIN! YOU MUST HAVE HELPED HIM, HOLLY!
YOU CAN'T MEAN THAT, HEC...
WAP

SHUT UP! GET IN THE CAB! YOU'RE GOING TO HELP ME FIX THOSE TURKEYS IN THE BACK AND THEN I'LL DECIDE WHAT TO DO ABOUT YOU!
SLAP
NEXT ISSUE: THE PUNISHER MAKES A SPEEDY RECOVERY!

Punishing Mails

EDITOR: DON DALEY ASST. ED.: ROB TOKAR

WE APPRECIATE YOUR COMMENTS. PLEASE WRITE TO: PUNISHING MAILS 575 MARVEL COMICS GROUP 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, NY 10016

PLEASE TELL US IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR FULL ADDRESS PRINTED.

Dear Punisher Staff,

I just purchased and read PUNISHER #26, and I thought I had better write and commend you dudes. So here it is:

I must commend you people for a great issue as well as an awesome series.

One aspect about the story that intrigued me was that there was hardly any violence (rare for a PUNISHER story) *and it was still good.* Let me figure out what else I liked. Hmmm . . . oh yes, the artwork. Russ Heath is the best penciler this series has had, in my opinion, since a two issue stint in #'s 6 and 7 by David Ross. By the way, what's David up to these days? It would be great to see him do a few more issues (hint, hint) instead of just being a back-up that I really liked. Oh well . . .

The art in this series has been a roller coaster, I think. Klaus Janson started this series, but I never really liked him. Then came the aforementioned David Ross, and you already know my thoughts about him. Next up to bat was Whilce Portacio (you sure pick guys with different names). I didn't really appreciate his pencils. Offhand, I can't remember ever seeing Frank's eyes during the Portacio Era. After him was Stroman. Shea Anton Pensa was pretty good, but the Punisher looked a little young. I was familiar with Erik Larsen from *Doom Patrol*, but that didn't mean I enjoyed him. Actually, he isn't all that bad, but I think there are better out there. Then, Russ Heath appears, and you know my feelings on that subject.

At least you've stuck with one heckuva writer in Mike Baron. His stories have always been entertaining as well as keeping up with today's headlines. The storylines that take up more than one issue are the best. Issue #19 was great, I think, but could have been even better if it was stretched out another issue or so. Take a look at all the two and three issue storylines and you'll find that the majority of the readers liked (or even loved) them. I'm not saying that one-ishers are bad, but they could be better if they were expanded.

Any chance of Frank going international like Mack Bolan? It would be interesting to see him go up against terrorists. They are crime, right?

Jeff Kaisershot
11321 Spaulding
Omaha, NE 68164

Terrorists are crime, Jeff, and the Punisher has, in fact, faced them in the past. Issue #7, one of the aforementioned David Ross issues, featured the Punisher battling international terrorists who were attempting to poison New York City with powdered plutonium.

As for David Ross, you can check out his work inked by Russ Heath in the PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL #s 14 and 15 (possibly still on sale if you rush). David and Russ *did not* do PWJ #15—it was actually Jim Lee and Danny Bulanadi (the credits were switched to keep you on the ball.)

For those of you who might have been confused by Jeff's references to "Frank," let us explain that "Frank Castle" is the name the Punisher is currently going by, and it may or may not be his real name — see the "Assassin's Guild" Punisher Graphic Novel for more hints in that direction.

To the Punishers:

Issue #26 had a good story behind it, like most issues of the PUNISHER. It had everything needed for a comic book of this nature: action, suspense, etc. I do, however, have a complaint about this issue: *the artwork!*

The Punisher suddenly looks like a teenager in college! Come on, guys, I know the Punisher is no spring chicken. The guys at Scully's Ninja Training Camp (a few issues back) said this about him. I think you should bring back the team that did #8. At least then he looked as old as he is; in fact, he looked just right.

George Mantis
W. Hempstead, NY

Well, George, it sounds like you won't be satisfied until we show the Punisher keeping his dentures in a Kevlar-lined glass beside his bed! The Punisher's apparent age may waver a bit, given each artist's different interpretation of the character, but we think he always retains his hard edge, regardless of who is drawing him.

Dear Punishing Mails,

I dare you to print this.

Joe Buccino
417 Lake Ave.
Deer Park, NY 11729

How could we pass up a letter so full of insightful comments and valuable advice? We feel that the readers of the PUNISHER peruse each month's letters section looking for a letter precisely as interesting and informative as yours. And who could deny that your missive was well worth the 25c stamp you waste—er, used to mail it with?

Dear PUNISHERS:

Please keep Russ Heath as the regular artist on this book: This is what the Punisher should look like (p.22, panel 6)!

Oh yeah, Mike Baron and John Wellington weren't so bad either!!

Matthew "Void" Daigneault
380 Hickson
St. Lambert, Quebec
CANADA J4R 2P1

Wait, we're confused—Mike and John weren't so bad looking?

Dear Carl,

When I was first told by Erik (Larsen) that there was going to be another artist on the book I was a bit apprehensive. I thought "Oh great, who are they going to get this time?" After the artist on the "Down Under" stint, I was not looking forward to an artist that I had never heard of before. Then I went to my local comic book store (it's in Bakersfield, but that is beside the point) and saw that the new issue had come out and with it a new artist. I quickly glanced over it and was not disappointed. After I got home I was able to get a better and slower look at the book and I was really happy then. I don't know who Russ Heath is or what other art he has done, but I hope that he will be doing more of it in the future. I think what first got me about his work was issue #26's splash page. Once I saw that I knew he was good. The whole book had a realistic, artsy-type look to it. It is what the book has needed all along. Erik's work gave the book a hard, edgy feel, but this stuff is what the doctor ordered.

To compliment the artwork and not the storyline would be a shame, so I will also give high praise to the job that Mr. Baron did this issue. It was, as per norm, a suspenseful, action packed adventure into the realm of fantasy, one that I am glad to take month after month. As long as Mike writes the book, I will read it.

Well done, everybody. I hope that Russ will be the artist on the book as long as possible and that the quality of the book will stay as good as it is now.

◆

Galen S. West
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